

INFO	LOG-00	AID-00	AMAD-00	CA-00	INL-00	DODE-00	DS-00
	DHSE-00	EUR-00	UTED-00	VCi-00	H-00	TEDE-00	INR-00
	IO-00	MOFM-00	MOF-00	VCIE-00	NSAE-00	OIG-00	OMB-00
	NIMA-00	EPAU-00	GIWI-00	DOHS-00	SP-00	IRM-00	NCTC-00
	FMP-00	EPAE-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-00	G-00	SAS-00
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DEPT FOR AF/C LISA KORTE; INR/B

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 SUBJECT: GABON: ALI BONGO TRAVELS REGIONALLY, DEALS WITH LOCAL PROBLEMS

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¶1. SUMMARY. President Ali Bongo Ondimba wasted no time after his inauguration to travel regionally in an effort to establish his credentials outside of Gabon. President Bongo travelled to the Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo where he met with senior governmental leaders. Prior to departing Gabon, President Bongo declared his intention to hold the council of ministers meeting in various cities throughout Gabon, starting with Port Gentil, in order for the government to better understand issues outside of Libreville. Also domestically, former Interim President Rose Rogombe was formally re-invested with her seat as President of the Senate. Despite the recent activity on the international front, President Bongo's regional credentials and leadership remain uncertain. His efforts to ease tension in Port Gentil, a central location for anti-Ali Bongo sentiment, remains similarly up in the air. END SUMMARY.

 Ali Travels to CAR, EG, and DRC

¶2. In his first official travel beyond Gabon's borders, President Ali Bongo Ondimba visited Bangui, Central African Republic (CAR) on October 21 to meet with President Francois Bozize, and later that day met with President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo in Bata, Equatorial Guinea (EG). On October 24 President Bongo traveled to Kinshasa, DRC to meet with Joseph Kabila and attend the 14th CEEAC Presidential Conference. In addition to discussing bilateral issues with each head of state, President Bongo likely reviewed regional conflict and economic issues, including the theft of funds at the Bank of Central African States (BEAC) and the appointment of a new BEAC Governor (reftel).

¶3. President Bongo's visit to EG was closely watched in Gabon for signs that several sensitive issues might be addressed. There were rumors throughout the election campaign period that the EG president, government, or unnamed other individuals supported opposition Fang ethnic group candidates in Gabon, namely Andre Mba Obame, a former close associate of President Bongo. Also, President Bongo has been reputed to be the stumbling block on the Gabonese side to resolving the dispute with EG over ownership of Mbanie Islands and their potentially rich off-shore oil fields. Although Gabon has controlled the position of governor of BEAC, EG has surpassed Gabon as the largest depositor in the bank. Gabon's retention of the governor position and the investigation of the BEAC scandal will require the cooperation of presidents Obiang Nguema, Bozize and the other regional heads of state. (Note: The next meeting of the BEAC heads of state will take place in Bangui in November. End Note.)

¶4. Gabon and Equatorial Guinea are being criticized by other members

of the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC) for lack of effort regarding economic integration. CEMAC, which regulates the CFA currency in use by the member nations, has a growing interest in free trade and open borders across the 6 countries.

¶5. As for Gabon-CAR relations, it remains to be seen whether President Bongo will take on the role that his father played in facilitating contacts between Bozize's government and CAR rebel factions, and also support Gabon's continuing role as the backbone of the Central African peace-building mission in CAR (MICOPAX). In his inauguration speech, Bongo stated that he would ensure his actions contributed to regional peace and security, and his subsequent speedy firing of the Gabonese governor of BEAC demonstrated firm action against corruption.

¶6. While in the Democratic Republic of the Congo local Gabonese media widely reported that President Bongo kept issues dealing with the Economic Community of Central African States (CEEAC) at the forefront. The administration of CEEAC, including overall budget and human resources, was reported as President Bongo's primary talking points with President Kabila at the 14th CEEAC Presidential Summit.

A New Direction For Port Gentil?

¶7. The dusk to dawn curfew that was imposed September 03 in Port Gentil, Gabon's commercial has been reduced to midnight to six. Port Gentil was the scene of rioting, vandalism and several deaths (three according to government reports; nine according to observers) following the announcement of Ali Bongo as the winner of the presidential election. To demonstrate his government's interest in Gabon beyond Libreville, the Council of Ministers declared its intention to hold its next meeting in Port Gentil and future meetings in other Gabonese cities.

Former Interim President Rogombe Returns To Senate

¶8. Four months after assuming the Presidency according to the constitutional succession, Interim President Rose Francine Rogombe was reinstated as President of the Senate on October 20. She was praised by the Senate Vice President for her handling of the transition following the death of President Omar Bongo on June 10, including the one month mourning period followed by the preparations for the August 30 election. Appearing more at ease than in recent weeks, Rogombe greeted senate colleagues and well-wishers with Constitutional Court Madeleine Mbarantsuo and several newly appointed ministers at her side.

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